

SAT NOV 8 1986

# Shootings linked to jail gang trial

By Harry Harris  
The Tribune

A relative of a witness in the murder trial of two Black Guerrilla Family prison gang leaders was shot last month to keep the witness from testifying, Oakland police said yesterday.

A no-bail warrant charging two counts of attempted murder was served last night on Michael Cooperwood, 30, at Santa Rita Rehabilitation Center in Pleasanton, where he has been in custody since Oct. 28 for a parole violation.

He is accused of shooting Glenn Jones, 22, and Jones' girlfriend, Cassandra Wilkerson, 22, on the night of Oct. 13, police said. The couple were sitting in a car parked in the 4500 block of Montgomery Street in Oakland near Jones' home.

Jones was left paralyzed from the chest down by a bullet that lodged near his spine,

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while Wilkerson was wounded in the leg.

According to police, Cooperwood was acting on a request issued by James D. Benson, a reputed BGF leader.

Police said Cooperwood was allegedly running street activities for the BGF while Benson was in custody. The BGF is a statewide prison gang known to be involved in robberies and drug trafficking.

Benson is presently on trial in Alameda County Superior Court along with fellow gang member Randy Alana for the June 1984 slaying of a fellow inmate at the North County Jail in Oakland.

Oakland police said Jones is related to a witness in the trial whom they would not identify.

Last week an Alameda County sheriff's sergeant testified at a heavily guarded pre-trial hearing in the case that Benson and Alana also put out a \$100,000 contract on Deputy District

Attorney Russ Giuntini and witness Mario Hamilton.

Sgt. Ronald Kolodzieczak testified an informant told him the killings were to be carried out by five men, including Cooperwood.

Neither Giuntini nor Hamilton have been harmed, and Hamilton is not the witness who is related to Jones.

Oakland Sgt. Phil Hickman said yesterday that an informant contacted police this week and said the shooting of Jones was the result of a "hit" ordered by Benson to intimidate a witness into not testifying.

The informant also said Cooperwood was the gunman, police said.

Police said Cooperwood and a second gunman, who is still being sought, were actually seeking another relative of the witness. But when they could not locate that person, it was decided to attack Jones, police said.

Hickman said Cooperwood walked up to the car in which Jones and Wilkerson were sitting and opened fire.

Police said Cooperwood has been identified by witnesses as the assailant.

**— Will Jones contributed to this story.**

# Ex-prison gang member was victim of shooting

WED NOV 19 1986

By Harry Harris  
The Tribune

A man shot to death in an East Oakland apartment Monday night was a Black Guerrilla Family prison gang associate reportedly involved in a plot to kill an Alameda County deputy district attorney prosecuting a case against two gang members, law enforcement sources said yesterday.

Billy Ray Barber, 31, died in a hail of gunfire inside an apartment in the 100 block of Catron Drive about 7:15 p.m. Monday.


A second man, Jawahn Springfield, 20, who police said was a longtime friend of Barber's, suffered numerous cuts when he jumped through a window in the apartment to escape the gunfire.

Sgt. Jerry Medsker said police believe several other people were present in the apartment at the time of the shooting but no one is in custody. Medsker said he was not sure of the motive for the shooting.

Other law enforcement sources said the shooting may be connected with the arrest Nov. 7 on attempted murder charges of Michael Cooperwood, a reputed Black Guerilla Family leader.

Cooperwood is charged in the Oct. 13 shooting of Glenn Jones, 22, a relative of a witness in the current murder trial of Guerrilla Family members James Benson and Randy Alana. They are charged with stabbing to death a fellow inmate at the north coun-

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ty jail in Oakland in June 1984.

A woman who was with Jones also was wounded in the Oct. 13 shooting.

Police said at the time of Cooperwood's arrest informants said Jones' shooting was the result of a "hit" ordered by Benson to intimidate Jones' relative into not testifying.

In a pre-trial hearing for Benson and Alana last month, an Alameda County sheriff's sergeant testified the two had put out a \$100,000 contract on prosecutor Russ Giuntini and another witness in the case.

Sgt. Ronald Kolodzieczak testified an informant told him the killings were to be carried out by five men, including Cooperwood and Barber.

Shortly after that testimony both Cooperwood and Barber were jailed on parole violations.

The attempted murder charges were subsequently filed against Cooperwood while he was in custody on the parole violation.

Barber was not charged in connection with the alleged plot against Giuntini and he was released from custody three weeks ago when his parole was up.

Barber was paroled from state prison in June for his part in the June 1981 robbery-murder of Jeffery Gray.

Medsker, who investigated that case, said Barber led a group of men who invaded a home where Gray was staying intending to rob the occupants of narcotics. Gray died in a fusillade of bullets.

According to court records, seven of eight suspects involved in that killing were subsequently convicted, with Barber being allowed to plead guilty to robbery and being an accessory.

In December 1973, a then 17-year-old Barber was sentenced to the California Youth Authority after being convicted of second-degree murder for his part in the slaying a month earlier of a MacArthur Boulevard storekeeper during an attempted robbery, police said.



# Four accused in plot to murder witness

THU JUL 29 1993

■ Case stems from slaying of well-to-do businessman in 1987

By Harry Harris  
and Danielle Cass  
STAFF WRITERS

A plot by a convicted murderer and a prison gang to kill a witness who might send him to the gas chamber has been foiled with the arrest of four people, including the man's 70-year-old mother, sources said Wednesday.

Charged with conspiracy to commit murder are Steven Bonilla and Michael Cooperwood, law enforcement sources said. Bonilla is facing a court hearing in Alameda County to determine if he will be executed for a 1987 murder. Cooperwood is a leader of the notorious Black Guerrilla Family.

Bonilla's mother, Ella, of Mountain View, who allegedly arranged a \$10,000 payment for the planned killings, and Cooperwood's girlfriend, Isola "Tiny" Taylor, also have been charged, the sources said.

Bonilla, who was convicted last year of murdering his business partner, Jerry Harris, allegedly met Cooperwood while both were incarcerated in the North County Jail in downtown Oakland, sources said.

Cooperwood was in custody on unrelated attempted murder charges while Bonilla is currently awaiting a penalty-phase jury trial to determine if he gets the death penalty or life in prison.

Sources said the two men talked about Bonilla's case and Cooperwood allegedly agreed to arrange for the murder of Harris' widow, Susan Harris, who

planned to testify against Bonilla in the penalty trial.

Sources said that a few weeks ago a suspicious man showed up at Susan Harris' southern Alameda County home, but she refused to identify herself. The man then took a picture of her and ran off toward a car, sources said.

A relative of Harris chased the man and got the license plate of the car, which sources said turned out to belong to Cooperwood's girlfriend, Taylor.

Authorities then began monitoring telephone calls and mail of Cooperwood, Bonilla and William Nichols, Bonilla's convicted accomplice in the Harris killing, sources said. Authorities also obtained search warrants for Cooperwood's cell and Taylor's home.

Sources said that based on the evidence gathered, Taylor and Ella Bonilla were arrested as they left the jail after visiting hours Sunday.

Steven Bonilla's penalty phase trial is scheduled to begin Sept. 20. An earlier trial to determine whether he would be executed ended in a mistrial in June 1992 after the jury deadlocked 11-1 for the death penalty.

Bonilla had arranged for Jerry Harris' murder so Bonilla could take over Harris' businesses, which included the Hot Rod cafes in Fremont and Alameda and the Baritz discotheque in Cupertino.

On Oct. 20, 1987, Bonilla lured Harris, who lived in the exclusive Blackhawk development in Danville, to a Pleasanton business park.

Staff Writer Paul Grabowicz contributed to this story.

# Local jury to decide if killers live or die

SUN APR 17 1994

*Cooperwood, Michael*

**By Danielle Cass**

STAFF WRITER

OAKLAND — Starting Monday, jurors in Alameda County Superior Court will hear a classic story of greed, jealousy and business: One business partner kills the other and buries his body in the desert so he can take over a thriving East Bay restaurant chain.

The story's ending, however, is up to 12 jurors. They will choose either the death penalty or life in prison for the murderer and his hired accomplice.

The players are Stephen Bonilla and William Nichols, who lured Blackhawk businessman Jerry Harris to a Pleasanton business park in 1987, smothered him with duct tape and buried his body in the Nevada desert.

Bonilla wanted to take over Harris' Hot Rod cafes in Fremont and Alameda, and his discotheque in Cupertino. He hired Nichols six months before to help with the murder.

Both men were convicted of murder in 1992. Yet their first penalty trial ended in a mistrial when one juror refused to deliberate. The other 11 jurors voted for death.

The second penalty trial starts Monday in Alameda County Superior Court.

The story has a new twist this time. Last summer, Bonilla allegedly plotted — from jail — to have Harris' widow Susan killed so that she would not testify against him.

Court records allege that Bonilla, 45, hired Michael Cooperwood, leader of the notorious Black Guerilla Family prison gang, to arrange the hit. Bonilla and Cooperwood hatched the plan from the North County Jail in Oakland, the records say. Bonilla's 71-year-old mother and Cooperwood's girlfriend did the outside work, police said.

The plan fizzled when a suspicious man showed up at Susan Harris' southern Alameda County home, snapped a photograph of her and drove off. Police traced his car to Cooperwood's girlfriend, Isola Taylor.

Now Cooperwood and Taylor are awaiting trial in Superior Court on the murder conspiracy charges. Cooperwood also has an unrelated

# Death penalty possible

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attempted murder case pending.

Bonilla's mother, Ella Bonilla, is awaiting a hearing in Municipal Court on the conspiracy charge.

In Bonilla and Nichols' new penalty trial, their attorneys will try to convince the jury that life in prison without parole is the appropriate price for the crime.

"This case is not the worst of the worst. The death penalty should be reserved for the worst cases," said Nichols' attorney, Assistant Public Defender Howard Harpham.

Bonilla's attorney, Spencer Strellis, says he will show the jury that life in prison is a just penalty for Bonilla.

But the prosecutor will describe Bonilla as a man who spent his entire life hiring people to kill other people, and Nichols as a paid hit man.



# Alleged gang hit man receives life

MON FEB 13 1995

FROM WIRE REPORTS

OAKLAND — A reputed hit man for the Black Guerrilla Family prison gang was sentenced Friday to a term of at least 12 years in state prison for shooting a friend's wife.

At a hearing in a special basement courtroom guarded by six armed bailiffs, Michael Cooperwood was sentenced by Alameda County Superior Court Judge Joanne Parrilli to a life term for his attempted murder conviction, plus 19 years for his six prior felony convictions as well as other enhancements.

Cooperwood's attorney, Malcolm Smith, said Cooperwood will be eligible for parole in about 12½ years because he's already spent more

than two years in custody.

The only good news for Cooperwood Friday was that prosecutor John Jay dismissed charges that Cooperwood, his wife, Isola, and two other people conspired to murder a witness in an unrelated death penalty case.

Dressed in a red jail uniform, Cooperwood, who has long, braided hair, appeared to be in a good mood, smiling and waving to his wife, then saying "happy anniversary" to her as he was led away to state prison.

According to Jay, Cooperwood ambushed Carol Tasker in East Oakland on Nov. 17, 1992.

Jay said Cooperwood was a friend of Tasker's husband and a

witness testified that Cooperwood told him that the husband, who was in prison, had asked him to shoot her.

Jay said there was conflicting evidence about the motive, but the husband may have suspected that Tasker was going out with other men while he was in prison.

Cooperwood was charged with a second count of attempted murder for allegedly shooting Randy Alana, another reputed Black Guerilla Family member, on Oct. 7, 1992, but jurors acquitted him of that charge.

Cooperwood was also charged with conspiracy to murder for allegedly participating in a plot to kill

Susan Harris, the widow of nightclub owner Jerry Lee Harris, who was murdered in Pleasanton in 1987.

Stephen Wayne Bonilla of Mountain View and William Nichols of Mesa, Ariz., have been convicted of murder with special circumstances for the death of Jerry Lee Harris.

Bonilla has been sentenced to death and Nichols faces life in prison without parole.

According to a Black Guerilla Family member who testified during the penalty phase of the trial of Bonilla and Nichols, Bonilla hired Cooperwood in 1993 to arrange for another gang member to kill Susan Harris.